PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
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DECCAN BIRDERS EVENTS

In light of the Corona virus (COVID-19) epidemic, all Deccan Birders Field Trips and Indoor Meetings are on hold until further notice. Details of upcoming activities will be communicated once the situation improves.

BET ON CORBETT FOR BARBETS!
Trip Report: December 2020

Text & Photos: Shivakumar N
(With inputs from Partho Ghosh, Sharad Khanna and Rajesh Bhalla)

Changeable Hawk Eagle

Almost every year, for the past 20 years, I have been making 'pilgrimage' trips to Corbett National Park. My first trip to Corbett was in 1991; before that I had only seen Eturnagaram and Pakhal Wildlife Sanctuaries. Being a resident of New Delhi has its advantages, one of them being its proximity to Corbett. I have always been in love with Corbett because of its magnificent jungles and varied landscapes. Every visit has sprung pleasant surprises for me. However, in recent years, due to its popularity and the increase in the number of curious tiger watchers and photographers, it has become difficult to get bookings for the lovely Forest Rest Houses (FRH) located deep inside the jungles of Corbett.

My most recent trip to Corbett was in the third week of December, 2020. It was not easy as many trains were cancelled and taxis were not willing to go that far from Delhi because of COVID. We were asked by the authorities at Dhikala to get COVID-Negative certificates. Added to this was the severe cold at Dhikala. In spite of this, and the very basic facilities offered at Dhikala, the lure of the jungle was too overpowering and we took the plunge. The late-night train from Delhi railway station dropped us at Ramganga station at 5.00AM – in the pitch darkness, only cops were seen on the deserted platform ensuring we had COVID permits.

Scarlet Minivet

Of the seven safari trips into the jungles, the first and the last were the most fascinating. As we soon as we entered one morning we saw the reclusive Yellow-throated Martens sauntering across the road. On the last day of the last jungle safari we were extremely lucky to see a mother tigress hunt down a male Chital deer while coordinating with her three young cubs, all in full view of the tourist gypsies. Equally surprising was the arrival of two Red-headed Vultures within 15 minutes of the kill, magically dropping out of the azure sky.

Tiger with Chital kill

During the other safaris, we had a whale of a time watching many species of birds like the White-rumped Shama or the White-browed Fantail. This time, there seemed to be more Changeable Hawk Eagles and less of Crested Serpent Eagles in comparison to my earlier trips. Photographing the feathered friends in the subdued light of the forest was challenging as the digital cameras often refuse to read the light right.

The FRH of Dhikala is the most sought after due its fantastic location, with open grasslands, tall tree patches and the magnificent Ramganga River. Not to mention the forest denizens – tigers, herds of elephants, deer and a variety of birds.

White-rumped Shama

Dhikala also happens to be a gateway to the interiors of the park. The place offers a panoramic view of the valley with the Kanda ridge in the backdrop. The old Forest Rest House at Dhikala range is a historic structure built over a hundred years ago, and having a unique charm of its own with elephant stables, canteens, parking space and a dormitory. Unfortunately the elephant rides have long been stopped but the tame elephants still live at Dhikala performing forest duties and/or leading a retired life.

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch

The speciality of Corbett National Park is that it is among the few National Parks of India that permits night stay inside the buffer zone. The age-old Forest Rest Houses are built right inside the core area of the Tiger Reserve, assuring a real taste of the wilderness. A fine balance is created in the safari zones enabling better tourism management without disturbing the natural habitat of the wildlife species.

Grey Bushchat

This time around, we had an assured two-night stay in Dhikala range but also ensured a one-night stay at Malani and Gairal Forest Rest Houses. Malani is located next to a gurgling brook 12km northwest of Bijrani. Strategically located at the edge of core zone of the tiger reserve, Malani has a lot to offer, with the most picturesque surroundings and complete solitude. It has just two large high-roofed rooms with one pantry, and the raw provisions have to be brought and cooked, which make the meal even more romantic in the inky night. The jungle drive to Malani is also quite a rewarding experience, meandering through ancient forests with massive banyan trees having their aerial roots hanging like tresses and filled with bird life.

Scaly-bellied Woodpecker

According to the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Corbett has 600 species of plants and an equal number of birds. This perfect combination is possibly the highest that is encountered anywhere in the subcontinent. Trees, shrubs, ferns, grass, climbers, herbs and bamboos and equal number of avifauna are spell-binding. The forests make an ideal home for some unique mammals and reptiles too. Corbett National Park is rich in flora, with more than 75% of the total area dominated by Sal forests.

Oriental Pied Hornbill

The diverse wildlife and breath-taking landscapes of Corbett Tiger Reserve are indeed tempting even to a layman. The natural uniqueness of the area was recognized long ago as a result of which, in 1936, Corbett attained the distinction of becoming the first National Park to be established in mainland Asia. Initially it was named as the ‘Hailey National Park’ but was later renamed as ‘Corbett National Park’ after James Edward Corbett, the noted hunter-turned-conservationist of the area, during the British era. The area came under Project Tiger in 1971 when Government of India launched this ambitious conservation project. Geographically it is located between the Shivalik Himalayas and the Terai region. The streams, rivers and ridges crisscrossing the topography, present Corbett with a remarkable variety of landscapes. This vivid mosaic of habitats – wet and dry, plain and mountainous, gentle and rugged, forests and grasslands – supports numerous plant and animal species, representing the Himalayan ecosystem as well as that of the plains. Corbett is one of the richest bird regions of the country and has been declared as 'Important Bird Area' (IBA) by Birdlife International.

Red-whiskered Bulbul

After one midday brunch at Dhikala before the evening safari, we saw waves of Cormorants fly by, hugging the river waters, while we had an aerial view from the high banks. The spectacle was truly fascinating to the lazy afternoon eye. On another occasion we saw a hunting party of Otters in the Ramganga River below, while the trees above had Fish Eagles ready to soar.

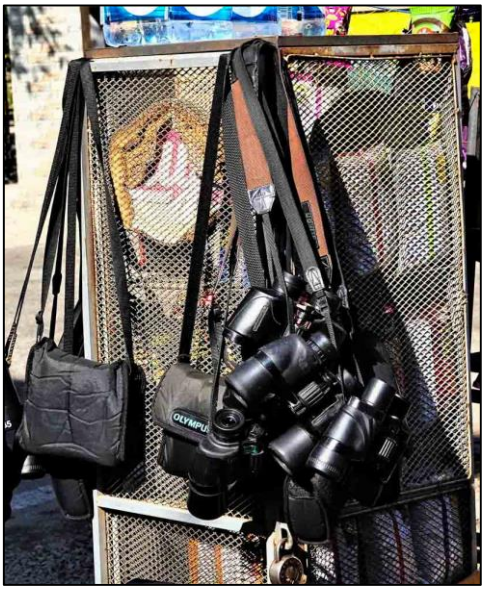
Panoramic view of the Gypsy breakdown location

During one trip into the jungle, the Gypsy broke down and we were stranded in the middle of nowhere. We were aware that tigers were no threat but elephants were known to be unpredictable! This added to the thrill of getting lost in the jungle. But the driver, being very resourceful, got the Gypsy going soon enough.

Crested Kingfisher

Plumbeous Water Redstart male

One night we were put up at Gairal Forest House located in another part of the park that could be accessed by a short detour from the Dhangarhi-Dhikala main forest road. The prime attraction of this Rest House is that it lies on the banks of River Ramganga. It has large modern rooms but the canteen is not quite up to the mark. We spotted at least two Crested Serpent Eagles occupying different trees along the curving riverside. Situated in the lap of nature, Gairal presents ideal conditions for nature watch and wildlife viewing from the guesthouse itself. Small and big crocodiles were seen basking on the banks soaking in the winter sun.



Binoculars for hire

Red Junglefowl

Common Hoopoe

Corbett attracts a large number of wildlife tourists and is divided into seven ecotourism zones with respective gated entrances for proper regulation and management. I am fortunate to have stayed in almost all the Forest Rest Houses except the one created recently. Here are some of the interesting Forest Rest Houses of the Corbett National Park located in different tourism zones – Bijrani, Sultan, Gairal, Sarapduli, Khinnanauli, Jhirna, Dhikala, Dhangari, Durgadevi, etc.

Unfortunately in recent years there is an immense influx of corporate tourists from the concrete jungles of the cities who come to escape the daily drudgery. To accommodate this surge, a number of luxury motels have cropped up surrounding the National Park. My only grouse is that the unruly visitors create a lot of ruckus and din, spoiling the tranquillity of Corbett. It is very important to control this menace and preserve the pristine beauty of Corbett National Park.

Lesser Fish Eagle with fish catch

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Changeable Hawk Eagle	*Nisaeyus (cirrhatus) limnaeetus*	29	Grey-headed Woodpecker	*Picus canus*
2	Lesser Fish Eagle	*Icthyopgaga humilis*	30	Streak-throated Woodpecker	*Picus xanthopyhaeus*
3	Pallas's Fish Eagle (call)	*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*	31	Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	*Dendrocopos canicapillus*
4	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*	32	Scaly-bellied Woodpecker	*Picus squamatus*
5	Collared Falconet	*Microhierax caerulescens*	33	Lesser Yellownape	*Picus chlorophus*
6	Scarlet Minivet	*Pericrocotus (flammeus) speciosus*	34	Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch	*Sitta (castanea) cinnamoventris*
7	Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	35	Blue-bearded Bee-eater	*Nyctyornis athertoni*
8	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*	36	Black-necked Stork	*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*
9	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	37	White-rumped Shama	*Copsychus malabaricus*
10	Red-headed (or King) Vulture	*Sarcogyps calvus*	38	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
11	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	39	Red-billed Blue Magpie (call)	*Urocissa erythrorhyncha*
12	River Lapwing	*Vanellus duvaucelii*	40	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*
13	Plumbeous Water Redstart	*Rhyacornis fuliginosa*	41	Jungle Owlet	*Glaucidium radiatum*
14	White-capped Redstart	*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*	42	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*
15	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	43	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	*Culicicapa ceylonensis*
16	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	44	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*
17	Crested Kingfisher	*Megaceryle lugubris*	45	Little Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*
18	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	46	Large Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
19	Oriental Pied Hornbill	*Anthracoceros albirostris*	47	Blue-throated Barbet	*Megalaima asiatica*
20	White-browed Fantail	*Rhipidura aureola*	48	Golden-fronted Leafbird	*Chloropsis aurifrons*
21	Common Stonechat	*Saxicola torquatus*	49	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
22	Emerald Dove	*Chalcophaps indica*	50	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
23	White-crested Laughingthrush	*Garrulax leucolophus*	51	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*
24	Black-hooded Oriole	*Oriolus xanthornus*	52	Himalayan Bulbul	*Pycnonotus leucogenys*
25	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*	53	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*
26	Grey Bushchat	*Saxicola ferreus*	54	Black-crested Bulbul	*Pycnonotus (melanicterus) flaviventris*
27	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*	55	Spotted Dove	*Stigmatopelia chinensis*
28	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*	56	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*

Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
57	Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*	63	Kalij Pheasant	*Lophura leucomelanos*
58	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	64	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*
59	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	65	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*
60	Blue Whistling Thrush	*Myophonus caeruleus*	66	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*
61	Small Niltava	*Niltava macgrigoriae*	67	Brown Rock Chat	*Cercomela fusca*
62	Red Junglefowl	*Gallus gallus*	68	Common Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?
Report: Sighting of Common Shelduck in Hyderabad

M S Ram

One could argue that there's nothing more relaxing in the world than engaging in a familiar hobby in a familiar place with a familiar person. This was certainly my expectation when, within a couple of hours of arriving from Bangalore, I decided to go birdwatching with a close friend, Rama Sarvani, in Sanjeevaiah Park, Hyderabad, located at the edge of Hussain Sagar Lake.

Hussain Sagar has been, more than once, a symbol of a new and resurgent city and has borne the brunt of an unplanned expansion as well as civilian and institutional neglect, and become the butt of insidious jokes about asphyxiation. However, Rama had been briefing me about her daily trips to the park, and how she had been seeing unusually high bird activity in the park, and especially in the waters around it.

Thus tempted, we arrived at Sanjeevaiah Park, we proceeded with the routine. Rama wielded her pair of binoculars in one hand while brandishing the eBird app on her phone in the other. The Great Backyard Bird Count had just begun. We saw the Large Cuckooshrike (not 'Cuckoo-shrike'; I always wondered why), Indian Golden Oriole, Indian Grey Hornbill, Green Sandpiper, Spot-billed Duck, Red-vented Bulbul, House Crow, Intermediate Egret, Common Myna, Common Tailorbird, Ubiquitous Prinia (just kidding) and a host of other birds that we were expecting to see.

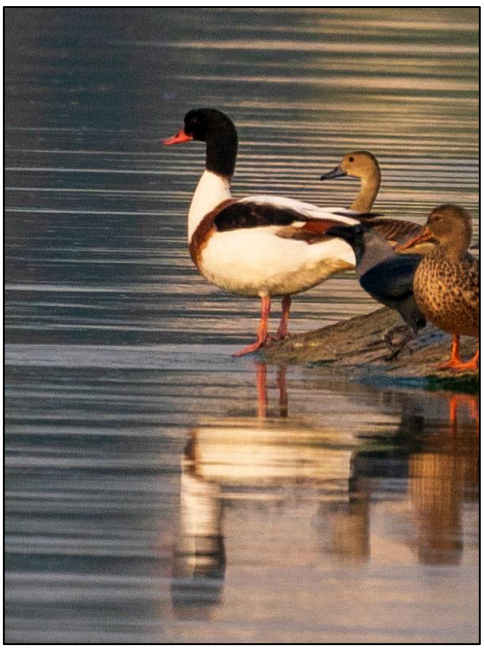
While I was initially sceptical about Rama's claim that there were around 300 Northern Shovelers in Hussain Sagar, my scepticism was soon put to shame by the sight I witnessed that morning – hundreds of Shovelers, near and far, on water, on rocks and in the air.

Common Shelduck, Northern Shoveler female, and a freshwater turtle (Photo: Rama Sarvani)

But something was not right on the rocks. "Wait, the one on that rock doesn't look like a Shoveler", I said to myself while quietly borrowing Rama's binoculars for the thousandth time. "Hey, is that a Common Shelduck?"

After a few seconds of frantic back-and-forth with the binoculars and seeing images of the bird on the Internet, we both let out a squeal of confirmation (the seeds of doubt were yet to be sown; "It could be a domestic duck"). We were elated because it was a lifer for both of us. Rama pointed out that it was recorded as a rarity in eBird. Neither of us realised that gravity of that statement at that time. Rama took a photo on her phone through her binoculars, a technique she seems to have mastered by now. Happy with the result, we went on to other pastures, had a heated argument about the identity of a Warbler, gave chase to a putative Woodpecker and called it a morning.

It wasn't long before we realised that the 'Common' Shelduck is not that common at all in the Indian subcontinent. In fact, there seemed to be no record of it from Hyderabad or even from Telangana. This was probably a vagrant and a true owner of the widely misused hashtag, #SingleChallenge.



Common Shelduck (Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

But what are the chances that the first record of a bird from a large state is from a polluted lake overlooked by most birdwatchers? One could forgive people for thinking that it was a case of mistaken identity, for domestic ducks (Mallard look-alikes) have been spotted in Hussain Sagar before. One could also forgive them for not being aware of the distribution of a rare species. But can one be forgiven for giving misleading common names to birds?

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet", wrote William Shakespeare in his infinite wisdom, blissfully unaware of the different kinds of Thrushes, Tits and Chats that might have called his backyard their home. He might have had second thoughts if only he had experienced half the plight today's birdwatchers have to go through day-in and day-out, dealing with synonyms and name changes that reflect species splits (though this usually has merit). And then, there's the unfortunate tale of the great Indian Bustard missing out on the National Bird tag due to its name.

Birds that contain 'common' in their names give the impression that they are common throughout their distribution when this may not be the case. There will, invariably, be regions in its distribution where it wouldn't be as abundant as in other regions. This could be due to sub-optimal environmental conditions, competition for resources from sympatric species, or stochastic processes. The Common Babbler, for example, is not the commonest Babbler species in a significant portion of its distribution. Even species such as Common Myna may be rare at the fringes of its distribution. This calls into question the practice of using the misleading prefix 'common', especially when alternative nomenclature that reflects their specific morphology, behaviour or distribution would be more apt. How about Yellow-eyed Myna instead of Common Myna, or White-necked Shelduck instead of Common Shelduck?

Surely, life would be much simpler if bird nomenclature followed some logic. Well, tough luck! Recently a Twitter user, @stu_bot3000, shot into ornithological limelight by starting a tweet thread on ridiculous bird names, with such notable mentions as Sad Flycatcher, Drab Seedeater, Noisy Pitta, Satanic Nightjar and Typical Swift. While their motive may have been to instigate 'bird stans' ('stan' is a slang word that refers to obsessive fans of a celebrity) like ourselves, birders were quick to join the bandwagon and make their own contributions to that riot of a thread with Invisible Rail (can we see it?), Intermediate Egret (is there an Advanced Egret?), Crested Goatsucker (yes!) and Pearly-vented Tody-tyrant (I had to look this up).

· 1d
Replying to @stu_bot3000
This one was named one Friday afternoon when everyone just wanted to go home
More
Greenish warbler
2
8
171
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10% RAD
To be fair at some point I'd pack it in if I were in charge of naming warblers, too.
15

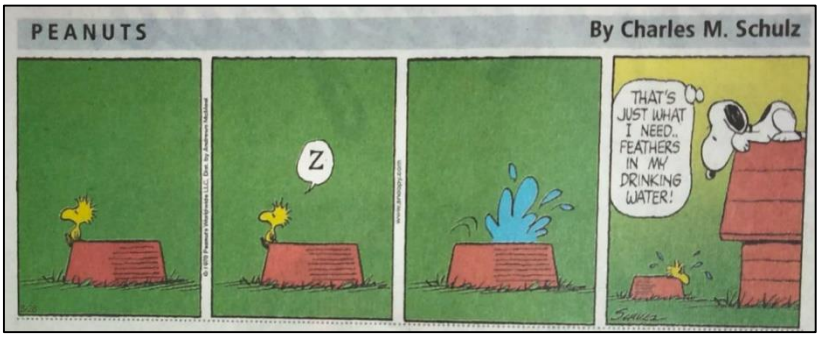
An 'interesting' hypothesis about the etymology of the Greenish Warbler (Source: Twitter)

Given this mess, I wonder if we should instead start using binomial nomenclature during our birding trips. So maybe the next time you see me grab someone else's binoculars to check out a domestic duck in a polluted lake, you might just be able to hear me think aloud – "Hey, is that a *Tadorna tadorna*?"

* * *

Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(From The Times Of India, September 18, 2017)

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DIMINISHING MANGROVES
Report: Krishna Delta, February 5-7, 2021

Text & Photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

Eurasian Curlew

The Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary, which I prefer to call the Krishna Delta Sanctuary, is about 90 km from Vijayawada, near a small town named Repalle. It has brackish water and one of the prime mangrove habitats. The area of the sanctuary is roughly about 200 sq km.

There are many islands within the sanctuary forming a group of Reserve Forests – like Yelichetladibba, Kottapalem, Adavuladivi, Pittalaadavi, NagayyaLakna, Uppurevu and Lankivanidibba. An estuary of the Krishna River flows through the mangroves of the sanctuary. This region is very rich in fauna and avifauna and species like Bottlenose Dolphin, Whale Shark, Fishing Cat, Golden Jackal, Black-capped Kingfisher and many other species are found here. There are also permanent breeding grounds and hatcheries created for the Olive Ridley Turtles.

Black-capped Kingfisher

Having visited this place regularly over the past few years, I have fallen in love with the boat ride through the mangroves that ends up close to the high seas. Over the years, we have seen many improvements in terms of the effort put in by the Forest Department officials to ensure strict imposition of wildlife laws related to shell trade and bird protection. The Forest Department has also ensured the involvement of the community and educated them on the importance of wildlife and its protection. One of the important activities undertaken here is to educate fishermen on safe disposal of the nets. Kudos to the FD team for successfully driving these activities.

However, in spite of the above efforts by the FD, there are still many challenges and threats to this location:

1. Destruction of mangrove forests – a common problem we are facing nowadays in all parts of the country;
2. Extensive fishing;
3. Industrial waste discharge;
4. Pesticides and Insecticides used for agriculture in areas surrounding the sanctuary

Year-Wise Species & Counts		
Year	**AWC Species**	**Count**
2017	39	1,021
2018	58	7,857
2019	54	26,055
2020	71	31,601
2021	81	29,000

During this visit, we saw a total of 137 birds in the sanctuary, of which about 81 species are covered under the Waterfowl Census. A brief report on the trip, written by my 8-year-old travel partner Rishi Reddy K, is given below. Rishi, who has accompanied us on a few such surveys earlier, now has a good idea about how the census is done, and is looking forward to many more.

Our trip to Krishna Delta, Feb 5-7, 2021

Text: Rishi Reddy Kalliath; Photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

Mudskipper

We started for Krishna Delta on Feb 5 evening, and I was very excited and happy to go to another place for birding. I learned a huge lesson in the car, that you should never watch anything or read anything in the car: I watched a movie for a little while, and I ended up feeling very nauseated. Anyway, after a few hours we reached the hotel and went to sleep.

The next day, Feb 6, my mother woke me up early in the morning, and in a second I was fully awake. I quickly got dressed, then we went to the boat place and got into the boat. The boat smelled of fish and sea creatures. We went in the boat with a few Forest Department people who came from Guntur to help us. The weather was cold and I was very excited. I felt the boat was a bit rocky, but I had a life vest. There was all these mangrove plants and the boat went from between these plants. They are the only plants that survive in salt water.

Common Kingfisher

In the mangroves, we saw:

- Black-capped Kingfisher – a Lifer for me;
- Common Kingfisher – one of my favorite birds;
- A Curlew taking a bath;
- Many Collared Doves, one Purple Heron, and a Green Bee-eater;
- A lot of Cormorants in flight, several Marsh Harriers, a Reef Egret (another Lifer) and many Gulls and Terns.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier

Western Reef Egret

Peregrine Falcon attacking Laggar Falcon

I ate a whole packet of *murukku* in the boat. Then we approached a sandbar and saw a Peregrine Falcon attacking another raptor – we couldn't identify the other raptor initially, but later found out that it was a Laggar Falcon! Some people said the Laggar Falcon's catch was a Golden Oriole, but in the photos I thought it seemed to have a Duck's head. Later the Peregrine Falcon flew away. The Laggar Falcon was guarding its food by spreading its wings to cover its food, but when the boat touched the island, it flew off with its catch.

Laggar Falcon with Golden Oriole kill

We docked and went to explore the sandbar. We walked and walked, and we barely saw any birds. I noticed some lines on the sand – Srikanth Uncle thought they were made by a snake and Lawrence Thatha thought they were made by crabs. I learned that the crabs make holes in the sand and live in there. We saw a live crab inside a shell, which we examined before I put it back in the water.

I collected a lot of shells on the way back – I thought they were very beautiful. Srikanth Uncle told me that collecting shells from a sanctuary is illegal, and asked me to go and ask the Forest Department Aunty about the shells. She told me that collecting shells was illegal, so I put the shells back in the water.

I saw a dead turtle. Many many insects were eating it. We then went back to the boat. That's when we saw the Ghost Crabs – they were bright red in colour! All the Ghost Crabs were running and jumping into the water. One was very scared and ran too fast and fell into the water.

Ghost Crab (Ocypode sp)

Then we started on our way back. First my Amma was sleeping, then when she woke up Lawrence Thatha went to sleep. While Thatha was asleep we saw a Golden Jackal. I saw a live turtle on the way back – it was running around in random directions.

Golden Jackal

After we got back, we went for lunch to a restaurant where they served us very super spicy *biryani*. Once we got back to the hotel, I had a bath and a nap, before we went out for some more birding. We were looking for a beach where we could see some birds. On the way I saw an Indian Roller, a Black Drongo and a lot of Great Egrets.

Great Egret

We finally reached the entry to the beach but there was a huge fight going on because the watchman was saying it was already 5.00PM and people couldn't enter, and other people were arguing with him. Anyway, we returned to our hotel, had dinner and some chocolates, and slept.

On Day-3, the last day of the survey, we got ready early and picked up some people on the way to the boat. Before we reached, I saw a Flameback Woodpecker. It was my Lifer. It was so beautiful – its crest was like the colour of the sunset.

When we reached and I saw the boat, I was so happy – it was a boat with a roof. As soon as I got into the boat, the generator started and I lost my balance!

Common Redshank

Then we set off. We saw a few Redshanks, Greenshanks, a Marsh Harrier and a Purple Heron. We reached a sandbar and I got off. We got very close to the Redshanks and Plovers. I saw two Black-winged Stilts flying, and many Terns and Gulls – Caspian Tern, Whiskered Tern, Pallas's Gull etc. I was running around and playing in the water – I felt very happy to be back in the water.

Pallas's Gull

Lesser Crested Tern

We then got back to the boat and we reached another sandbar and stopped the boat in the water. We saw some Pallas's Gulls, Caspian Terns and Whiskered Terns. I heard someone saying there was a Sandwich Tern here, but I didn't see it. I saw a Tern with a crest but that turned out to be the Lesser Crested Tern.

Terek Sandpiper

There were a lot of Gulls on that sandbar – to me, it seemed like there were 10,000 Gulls! The actual number was around 3,000 Gulls, though.

Heuglin's Gull

Striated Heron

Then the boat started moving again and, after sailing for some time, guess what we saw? We saw some Dolphins! I saw around 5 or 6 Dolphins. Then we started moving again. We ate lunch on the boat – the Forest Department people seemed to really like the lemon rice, but I wasn't eating any of that rice – so I just ate some *bondas*. We all then had dessert – it was a cannonball-shaped chocolate but smaller. We didn't see many birds on the way back. We came back to the hotel, packed and returned to Hyderabad.

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*	51	Gull-billed Tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*
2	Common (aka Green-winged) Teal	*Anas crecca*	52	Caspian Tern	*Hydroprogne caspia*
3	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	53	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*
4	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	54	Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*
5	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptis ruficollis*	55	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*
6	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	56	Greater Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bergii*
7	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	57	Sandwich Tern	*Thalasseus sandvicensis*
8	Spotted Dove	*Stigmatopelia chinensis*	58	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*
9	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	59	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*
10	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	60	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*
11	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	61	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*
12	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	62	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
13	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	63	Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*
14	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	64	Yellow Bittern	*Ixobrychus sinensis*
15	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	65	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
16	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	66	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*
17	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	67	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*
18	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	68	Intermediate Egret	*Mesophoyx intermedia*
19	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	69	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
20	Grey (aka Black-bellied) Plover	*Pluvialis squatarola*	70	Western Reef Heron	*Egretta gularis*
21	Pacific Golden Plover	*Plucialis fulva*	71	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
22	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus malabaricus*	72	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
23	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	73	Striated Heron	*Butorides striatus*
24	Lesser Sand Plover	*Charadrius mongolus*	74	Black-crowned Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*
25	Greater Sand Plover	*Charadrius leschenaultii*	75	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
26	Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	76	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocep halus*
27	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	77	Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*
28	Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*	78	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*
29	Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius aequata*	79	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*
30	Black-tailed Godwit	*Limosa limosa*	80	White-eyed Buzzard	*Butastur teesa*
31	Ruddy Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*	81	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*
32	Ruff	*Philomachus pugnax*	82	Pallid Harrier	*Circus macrourus*
33	Temminck's Stint	*Calidris temminckii*	83	Montagu's Harrier	*Circus pygargus*
34	Sanderling	*Calidris alba*	84	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
35	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	85	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*
36	Common Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*	86	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*
37	Terek Sandpiper	*Xenus cinereus*	87	Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*
38	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	88	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*
39	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	89	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*
40	Spotted Redshank	*Tringa erythropus*	90	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo a1his*
41	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	91	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
42	Marsh Sandpiper	*Tringa stagnatilis*	92	Black-capped Kingfisher	*Halcyon pileata*
43	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	93	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*
44	Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	94	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
45	Small Pratincole	*Glareola lactea*	95	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
46	Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	96	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
47	Brown-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*	97	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*
48	Pallas's Gull	*Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*	98	Laggar Falcon	*Falco jugger*
49	Lesser Black-backed (aka Heuglin's) Gull	*Larus heuglini*	99	Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*
50	Little Tern	*Sternula albifrons*	100	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*

Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
101	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	120	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
102	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	121	Lesser Whitethroat	*Curruca curruca*
103	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	122	Rosy Starling	*Pastor roseus*
104	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	123	Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
105	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*	124	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
106	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*	125	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*
107	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	126	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
108	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	127	Jungle Myna	*Acridotheres fuscus*
109	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	128	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
110	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	129	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
111	Oriental Skylark	*Alauda gulgula*	130	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
112	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	131	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
113	Jungle Prinia	*Prinia sylvatica*	132	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
114	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	133	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
115	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*	134	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
116	Booted Warbler	*Iduna caligata*	135	Western Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*
117	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentorus*	136	Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*
118	Dusky Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne concolor*	137	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
119	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*			

Some more photos that Srikanth Uncle took during the trip:

Pacific Golden Plover

Western Reef Egret in transition plumage

Lesser Sand Plover

Greater Sand Plover

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

Ruddy Shelduck male (L) and female (R) (Gajoldoba, West Bengal, January 24 & 25, 2021)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Tadorna*
Species: *T. ferruginea*
Size: 61-67 cm

Description & distribution: The Ruddy Shelduck, also known as the Brahminy Duck or Brahminy Shelduck, is a very distinctive duck, easily identified due to its largely orange-brown plumage. The head of the male is paler orange-brown than the body plumage, and is separated by a thin black collar. It has white lower and upper wing-coverts, contrasting starkly with the black rump, tail coverts, and tail and flight feathers. The inner surfaces of the wings show iridescent green speculum feathers. It has a black bill and dark grey legs. The female is generally similar, but the head and neck are almost white, and the black collar is absent. Plumage tends to fade as the birds grow older. Juvenile birds are similar to the female, but darker brown. The Ruddy Shelduck breeds mainly in south-eastern Europe, east across the Palearctic region to Lake Baikal, Mongolia and western China, although there are small resident populations in Ethiopia and north-west Africa. It has also been known to breed in the high-altitude lakes and swamps of Jammu and Kashmir. The Ruddy Shelduck winters mainly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and occasionally Sri Lanka, arriving by October and leaving by April.

Habitat & behaviour: The preferred breeding habitat of the Ruddy Shelduck is large wetlands, rivers, mud flats and rocky beaches, lakes and reservoirs. In the non-breeding season, it prefers slow-moving streams and rivers, ponds, lakes, marshes, flooded grasslands and brackish lagoons. During breeding season it often forms large congregations, but otherwise is usually seen in pairs or small flocks in inland water bodies like rivers, *jheels*, lakes and reservoirs.

The Ruddy Shelduck is a dabbling duck and mainly nocturnal. It is omnivorous and feeds on a variety of food sources – grasses, young shoots, grain, aquatic vegetation, as well as molluscs, crustaceans, aquatic insects, fish and reptiles. While foraging on land, it stays on grass or moist foliage; in shallow water it dabbles, and when the water is deeper, it up-ends but does not dive. The usual call is a nasal *aang aang*, like a quieter version of the honking of the Bar-headed Geese.

While breeding, they form strong pair bonds, and many even believe they pair for life. Pairs are very territorial and aggressive towards intruders – the initial charge is usually made by the female, with head lowered and neck outstretched, and uttering loud anger calls; if unsuccessful in chasing away the intruder, she may return and run around the male, trying to incite him to attack. The courtship display involves head dipping, neck stretching, tail raising and sometimes wing flapping, and mating usually takes place on the water.

Nesting: In the Asian breeding grounds – Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Nepal and Tibet – the Ruddy Shelduck breeds generally between April and June. The nest is built by the female and is a thick pad of grasses, feathers and down; it is away from the water, in a hole in a tree or abandoned building, cliff crevice, sand dune or even the burrow of another animal. The usual clutch consists of 6-10 pearly white or creamy white, mildly glossy, smooth-textured eggs.

Local name: The Ruddy Shelduck is known as *'Chakwa', 'Chakwi'* or *'Lal surkhab'* in Hindi, *'Brahmani batak'* in Gujarati, *'Bapana chiluwa'* in Telugu, *'Thara'* in Tamil, *'Thangathu thaaraavu'* in Malayalam, *'Kesar pandia'* or *'Panda hansa'* in Oriya, and *'Chakrawak'* in Sanskrit.

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